STARDUST & SOLILOQUIES

BY TRI VUONG

ACT 2
CHAPTER 3

THIS ISN'T MY STORY, BUT IT IS A STORY FOR ME TO TELL...

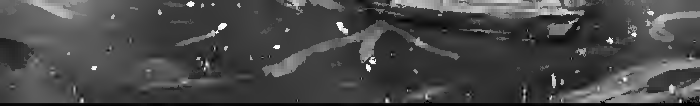
ON SEPTEMBER 26, 1970, A FREAK BLIZZARD STRUCK THE EASTERN COAST OF LABRADOR.

ITS ORIGIN WAS A SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY AND WOULD BE HOTLY DEBATED AMONG METEOROLOGISTS FOR MANY YEARS AFTERWARDS.

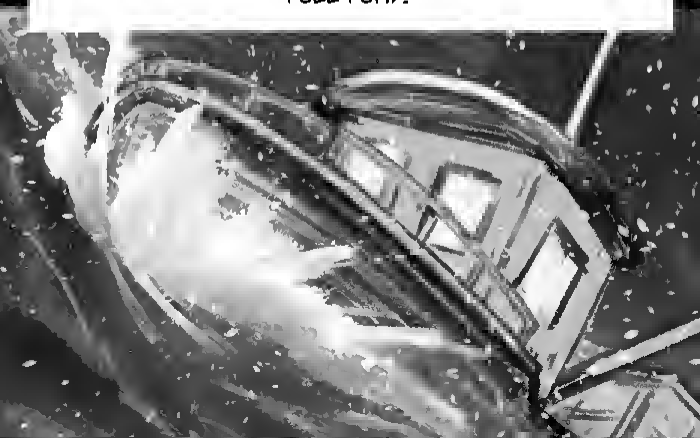
SCIENTIFICALLY, THE BLIZZARD SHOULD NOT HAVE OCCURRED WHEN IT DID. THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF SATELLITE, AIR PRESSURE AND HUMIDITY DATA FORECASTED CLEAR SKIES WITH MILD WINDS.

THE BLIZZARD DESCENDED WITHOUT WARNING. WITH A FURY THAT UNNERVED EVEN THE HARDENED MEN WHO SAILED REGULARLY ON THOSE WATERS.

MEN LIKE THE CREW OF THE *FISH-N-CHIPS*, A FISHING VESSEL FROM ST. JOHN'S THAT WAS CAUGHT IN THE MYSTERIOUS BLIZZARD.



AS UNLIKELY AS IT SEEMS, PROVIDENCE FAVORED THE TINY BOAT THAT DAY. FIRSTLY, BATTERED AS IT WAS BY THE VIOLENT WATERS, THE FISH-N-CHIPS WAS STILL FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE CAUGHT ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE STORM, THUS AVOIDING ITS FULL FURY.



SECONDLY, AND THIS IS THE MORE IMPORTANT FACTOR, THE FISH-N-CHIPS HAD AT ITS A HELM A MAN WITH NERVES OF STEEL.

A MAN MORE AT HOME ON THE OCEAN THAN ON LAND.

A MAN FORGED BY THE BITING WINDS AND THE CRASHING WAVES.

HIS NAME WAS...

EDMUND CRANE.

AGE: 49

THE HELL WITH ALL THIS SNOW?

CAPTAIN!
YOU'RE NOT GONNA BELIEVE THIS! THERE'S ANOTHER BOAT OFF THE STARBOARD BOW!

CAPTAIN, I THINK JIMMY'S BEEN DRINKING AGAIN.

THAT TRUE BOY? YOU HITTING THE SAUCE ON DUTY AGAIN?
I TOLD YA, I ONLY GOT ONE RULE ON MY BOAT!
WHEN ONE OF US DRINKS, ALL OF US DRINKS!
WILL YOU GUYS SHUT UP?!
TAKE A LOOK

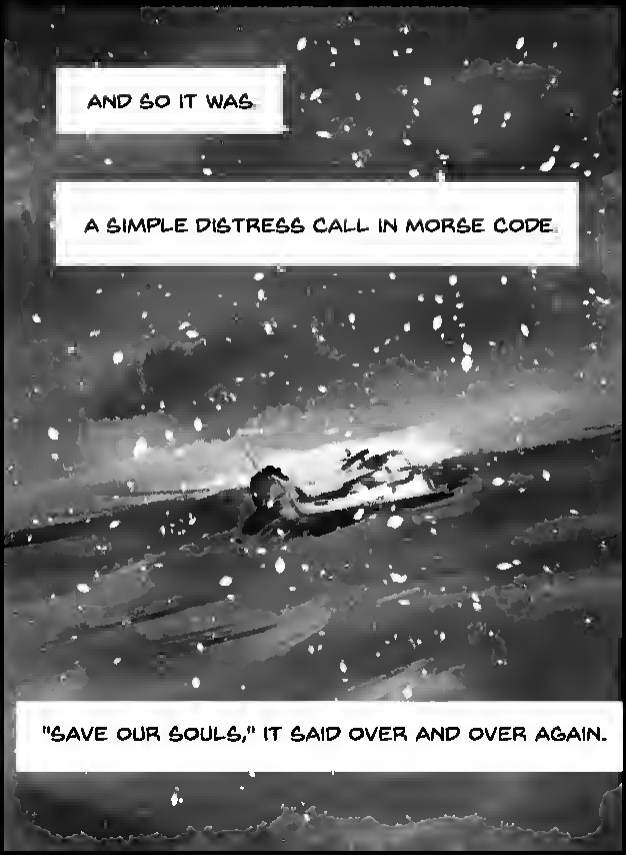
OUTSIDE!

WELL. I'LL BE DAMNED. SHE'S A BIG ONE.

MIGHT BE ONE OF THOSE BIG CORPORATE TRAWLERS. LOOKS LIKE SHE'S IN A BAD WAY.

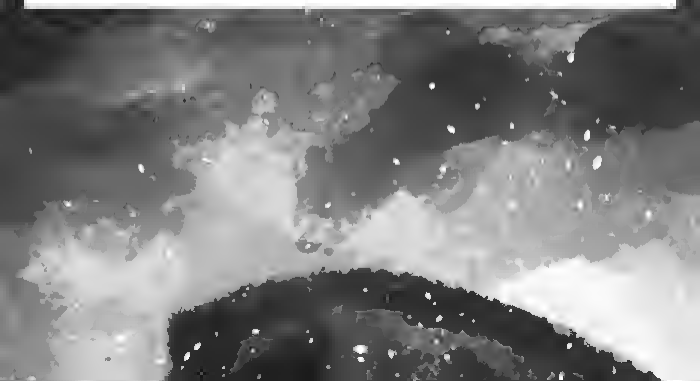
A BAD WAY.
CAPTAIN! THE RADIO!
IT'S A DISTRESS SIGNAL!

DOOT DOOT DOOT
DEET DEET DEET
DOOT DOOT DOOT


AND SO IT WAS
A SIMPLE DISTRESS CALL IN MORSE CODE.
"SAVE OUR SOULS," IT SAID OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

OVER AND OVER IT REPEATED ITSELF, AS EDMUND WATCHED THE SHIP STRUGGLE IN VAIN AGAINST THE CRASHING WAVES.

AND WHILE HE COULDN'T EXPLAIN HOW OR WHY, EDMUND KNEW THAT IF HE APPROACHED THE MYSTERIOUS SHIP ON THE HORIZON, IT WOULDN'T BE JUST DEATH WAITING FOR HIM...

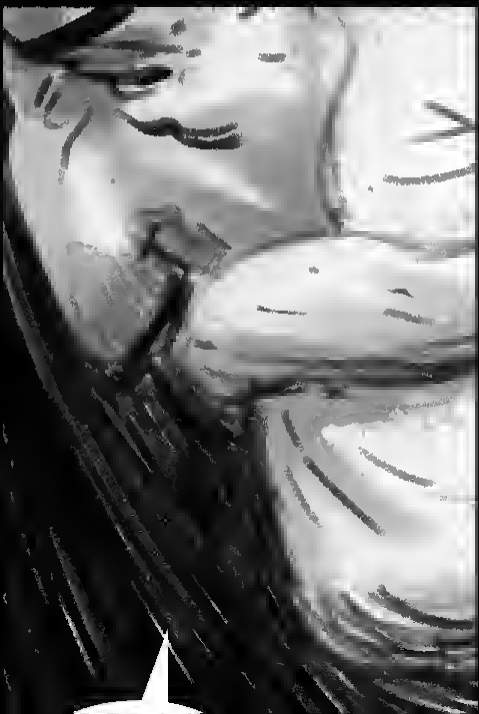


... BUT OBLIVION...

OBLIVION AND DOOM.

CAPTAIN! ARE WE GONNA GO GET THEM?

CAPTAIN?

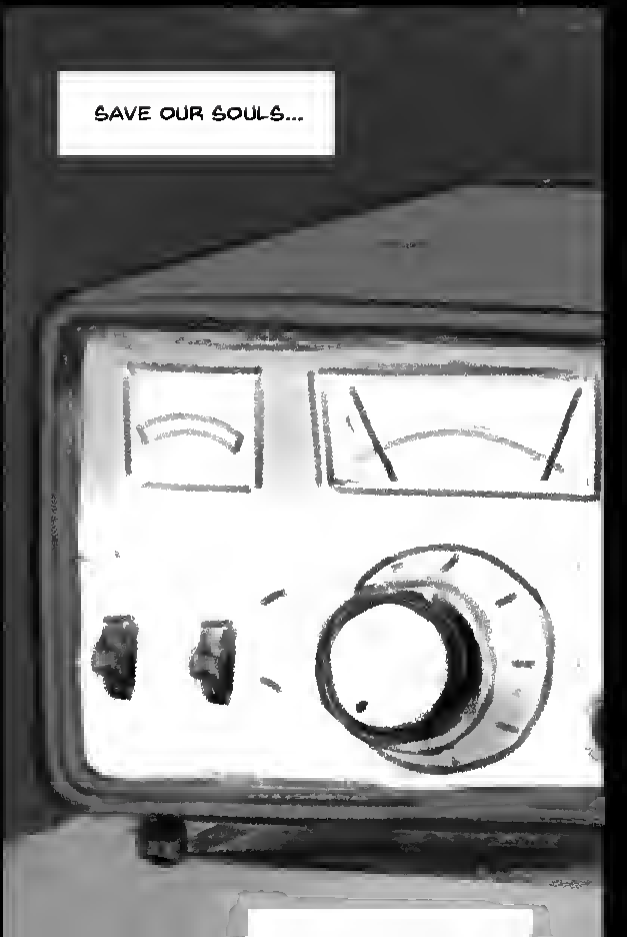


"IT WAS SIMPLY TOO DANGEROUS," EDMUND TOLD THE CREW... AND HIMSELF.

"THE FISH-N-CHIPS IS JUST TOO SMALL TO HANDLE THE STORM. WE WOULD GET OURSELVES IN THE SAME TROUBLE... OR WORSE..."

AND SO, THE CREW OF THE FISH-N-CHIPS WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS THE OTHER SHIP SLOWLY SANK INTO THE OCEAN OVER THE NEXT EIGHT AGONIZING HOURS.

ALL THE WHILE, THE SIGNAL CONTINUED ITS BROADCAST...


SAVE OUR SOULS...

SAVE OUR SOULS...

... SAVE OUR SOULS...

EVENTUALLY, WHEN THE STORM FINALLY BROKE, THE FISH-N-CHIPS LIMPED ITS WAY BACK TO PORT.

THE CREW WERE SHAKEN BY THEIR EXPERIENCE, BUT EVENTUALLY THE MEMORY OF THAT HARROWING NIGHT FADED, ONLY SURFACING OCCASIONALLY ON BITTERLY COLD NIGHTS.

THE STEADY, COMFORTING RHYTHM OF LIFE CONTINUED...

... BUT NOT FOR EDMUND CRANE.

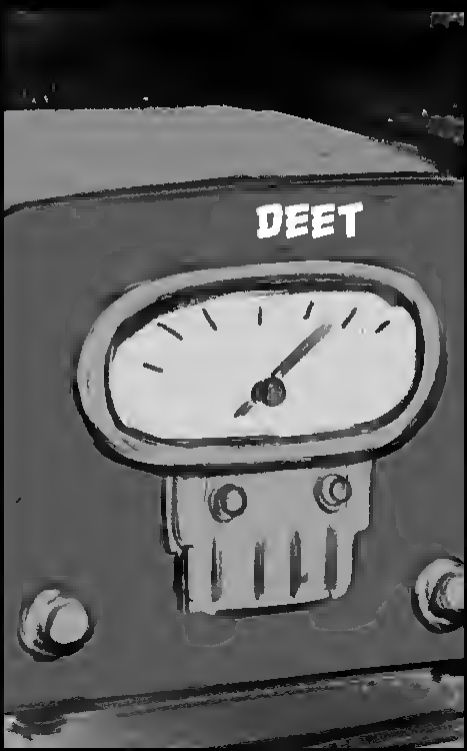
HE LEFT A PART OF HIMSELF BEHIND DURING THAT STORM. IT SANK INTO THE OCEAN ALONG WITH THE POOR SOULS ON THAT DOOMED SHIP.

HE LEARNED LATER THAT THE SHIP WAS THE CHINESE FISHING VESSEL, ZHONG TAI NO. 4...

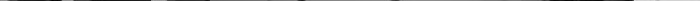
... WITH A CREW OF 70 MEN.

70 MEN, ALL PLEADING TO THE TINY BOAT IN THE DISTANCE THAT WOULD NOT COME TO THEIR AID.

HOW COULD THEY POSSIBLY FORGIVE HIM FOR HIS COWARDICE


DEET

... HOW COULD THEY REST IN PEACE...



... WHEN THE MAN WHO ABANDONED THEM STILL WALKED THE EARTH AND SAILED THE SEAS?

TO BE CONTINUED...

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

SOOOOO... APPARENTLY I MISUNDERSTOOD THE PLOT OF SPEED!

IRONICALLY, I HAVE FOUR OTHER SETS OF EYES

(OTHER THAN MY OWN) TO PROOFREAD THE COMIC AFTER I'M FINISHED WITH IT... AND NONE OF US CAUGHT THAT GLARING MISTAKE HAHA!

I GUESS IN OSCAR ZAHN LORE, THERE'S NOW A KEANU REEVES MOVIE CALLED "SLOW" NOW...

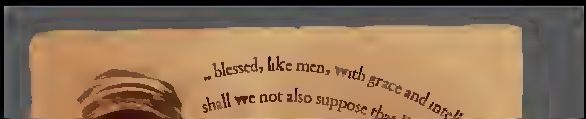
THE WONDERFUL (AND TERRIFYING) THING ABOUT WEBCOMICS IS THAT IT'S LIKE STORYTELLING JAZZ. THE BREAKNECK SPEED THAT EPISODES NEED TO BE FINISHED PROHIBITS ANY PROLONGED BOUTS OF INDECISION. YOU USUALLY NEED TO GO WITH YOUR GUT INSTINCT AND PRAY FOR THE BEST.

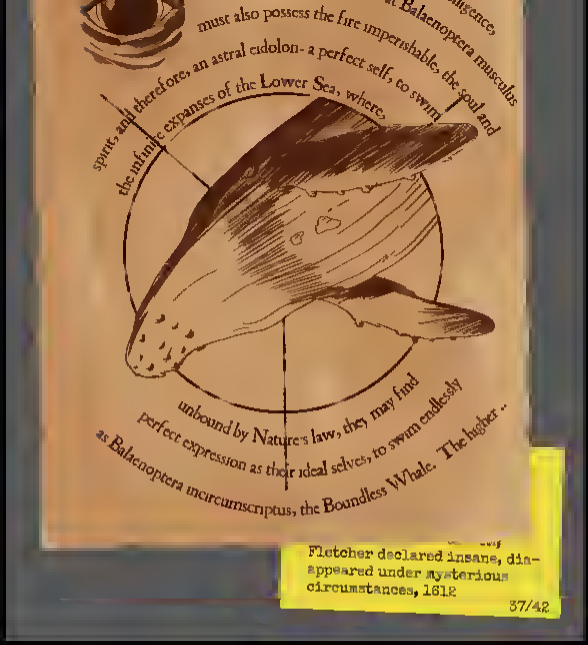
I'VE LEARNED TO TRUST MY INSTINCTS ALOT MORE AFTER WORKING ON OSCAR ZAHN FOR THE LAST YEAR. THE STORY ALWAYS BECOMES SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHAT I INITIALLY PLANNED AND IS USUALLY THE BETTER FOR IT.

THE NEGATIVE SIDE TO THIS IS THE OCCASIONAL EMBARASSING MISTAKES THAT CROP UP. REMEMBER MY POORLY TRANSLATED GERMAN AND THE HISTORICALLY INACCURATE CANADIAN FLAG?

I STILL CRINGE WHEN I THINK OF THOSE. THIS ONE IS AT LEAST ODDLY HILARIOUS :)

IN OTHER NEWS, JOHN'S ON VACATION IN JAPAN FOR A FEW WEEKS SO I'M ON MY OWN AGAIN. ALSO, ALFRED'S CREATED ANOTHER AWESOME POST DIGGING DEEPER INTO OSCAR-LORE ON PATREON. HERE'S A SNEAK PEEK!




must also possess the fire imperishable, the soul and
spirit, and therefore, an astral eidolon- a perfect self, to swim
the infinite expanses of the Lower Sea, where,
unbound by Nature's law, they may find
perfect expression as their ideal selves, to swim endlessly
as Balaenoptera incircumscriptus, the Boundless Whale. The higher...
Fletcher declared insane, disappeared under mysterious circumstances, 1612
37/42

AND FINALLY, A HUGE THANKS TO SOME NEW PATREON SUPPORTERS THIS WEEK:

REBECCA A.
SIMON S.
JAMES C.
ALEJANDRO S.

YOUR SUPPORT IS GREATLY APPRECIATED!

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